SPECIAL FEATURE NO. 3-2258 SEPTEMBER 12, 1978
RAY KABAKER

FOCUS: JACK WARNER

INTRO:

A PIONEER OF THE AMERICAN FILM INDUSTRY IS DEAD AT THE AGE OF EIGHTY-SIX. JACK WARNER, LAST OF THE FOUR WARNER BROTHERS. VOA WEST COAST CORRESPONDENT RAY KABAKER SURVEYS THE CAREER OF THE MAN WHOSE WORK IS HISTORY IN THE MOVIES.

VOICE:

HE AND A BROTHER PRODUCED THE FIRST TALKING FEATURE-LENGTH MOVIE FIFTY YEARS AGO, "THE JAZZ SINGER", WITH AL JOLSON. HIS LATER ACHIEVEMENTS INCLUDED: THE LIFE OF EMILE ZOLA, IN 1937; CASA BLANCA, IN 1943, CONSIDERED BY MANY TO BE THE BEST AMERICAN FILM EVER MADE; AND MY FAIR LADY, IN 1964, THE FILM JACK WARNER LIKED BEST. AS GUIDING EXECUTIVE OF THE WARNER BROTHERS MOTION PICTURE COMPANY, HE SHAPED MAINSTREAM TRENDS IN THE INDUSTRY--THE DISCOVERY OF GANGSTER PICTURES AS POPULAR ESCAPISM, AND THE ENCHANTMENT OF THE MUSICAL PLAY AS A MOVIE ART FORM. AND, ALONG THE WAY, HIS EYE FOR TALENT AND HIS EXECUTIVE POWER ESTABLISHED THE STARDOM OF EDWARD G. ROBINSON, BETTE DAVIS, ERROL FLYNN, HUMPHREY BOGART, JAMES DEAN, DORIS DAY, JOHN BARRYMORE, LAUREN BACALL, AND MANY OTHERS. ALTHOUGH NOT AN ACTOR HIMSELF, JACK WARNER WAS AT HOME ON THE INDUSTRY STAGE AND ON THE NATIONAL SCENE. HE WAS AN ENTERTAINING SPEAKER, A FRIEND OF IMPORTANT PEOPLE, A PATRIOT WHOSE MOVIES BOOSTED MORALE IN THE YEARS OF WORLD WAR TWO. IN HIS LATER YEARS, FORCED TO SLOW DOWN BY AGE AND ILLNESS, HE RETIRED FROM THE COMPANY THAT BORE THE FAMILY NAME AND PAUSED TO WRITE AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY. HE GAVE HIS TIME TO EDUCATIONAL AND CHARITABLE ACTIVITIES, ENDOWING A MULTIMILLION DOLLAR THEATER ARTS AND FILM CENTER AT THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA, IN LOS ANGELES. PERHAPS UPPERMOST, JACK WARNER'S LIFE

TESTIFIED TO THE NOTION OF THE AMERICAN DREAM. BORN TO A LARGE IMMIGRANT FAMILY THAT SETTLED IN OHIO, JACK WARNER LITERALLY TRAVELED THE ROAD OF RAGS TO RICHES. FROM THE FAMILY ENTERPRISE MOVIE HOUSE SHOWING SILENT FILMS, THE WARNER BROTHERS DEVELOPED A FILM DISTRIBUTION BUSINESS, AND THEN MOVED WEST, TO AN ISOLATED PLACE CALLED HOLLYWOOD, WHERE YOUNG JACK RENTED A BARN ON A MONTH-TO-MONTH BASIS, TO MAKE FILMS. AS A CROWNING ACHIEVEMENT, HE WOULD LATER SPEND SEVENTEEN MILLION DOLLARS ON ONE SHOW, A STUNNING AMOUNT IN 1964, FOR THE LAVISH FILMING OF "MY FAIR LADY", THE MUSICAL VERSION OF GEORGE BERNARD SHAW'S PYGMALION. JACK WARNER WON COUNTLESS AWARDS AND TESTIMONIALS BOTH IN AND OUT OF THE FILM INDUSTRY. HE IS REMEMBERED AS A TOUGH EXECUTIVE, WHOSE GOOD HUMOR SOMETIMES GAVE WAY TO BLUNT ABRASIVENESS. AS AN ABSOLUTE BOSS, HE WAS OFTEN THE OBJECT OF AMBIVALENT FEELINGS BY THE STARS WHO NEEDED HIM. HIS OWN ASSESSMENT OF HUMAN RELATIONS IN THE COMPETITIVE, TEMPERAMENTAL BATTLEFIELD OF HOLLYWOOD WAS THAT HE NEVER REALLY MADE CLOSE FRIENDS. EVERYONE WHO CAME TO SEE HIM, HE SAID IN HIS BOOK, WAS ASKING FOR SOMETHING OR SELLING SOMETHING. IF THAT IS SO, IT WAS ONLY BECAUSE HE HAD SO MUCH AND MEANT SO MUCH IN A DEFINITIVE PERIOD OF THE ART FORM OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY. HIS WIDOW HAS ASKED FOR A COMPLETELY PRIVATE BURIAL SERVICE, ONLY FAMILY, NONE OF THE STARS THAT SHONE FOR WARNER BROTHERS. IT WILL BE A QUIET END TO A TURBULENT ERA. JACK L. WARNER.

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